

G.F. Andrae Opera House
1124 Main Street
Stevens Point
Portage County
Wisconsin

HABS No. WI-152

HABS
WI-152
49-STEP
1-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Rocky Mountain Regional Office
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 25287
Denver, Colorado 80225

**NATIONAL PARK SERVICE
ROCKY MOUNTAIN REGION**

HABS WIS, 49-STEP0, 1-
ARCHITECTURAL DATA FORM

STATE Wisconsin	COUNTY Portage	TOWN OR VICINITY City of Stevens Point
HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FOR NAME) G.F. Andrae Opera House - Source: NRHP Nomination Form		EAS NO. WI 152
SECONDARY OR COMMON NAMES OF STRUCTURE Fox Theatre		
COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES) 1124 Main Street		
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE) 1893 Source: NRHP Nomination Form	ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE) Oscar Cobb and Sons, Chicago	
SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE) The G.F. Andrae Opera is historically significant to the City of Stevens Point as an early cultural center, live theatre and, later, movie theatre. As such it was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1982. Its nearly intact facade was also considered architecturally significant as a style of construction. (cont. next sheet)..		
STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE)		
MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS) The building has a frame structural system with brick exterior walls. The foundation of the original portion is of stone and of concrete block for the 1920 addition.		
SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTED) The original portion of the building is 50 feet wide on its Main Street facade and 140 feet deep. This area is two stories in height. The added stage area of the building (cont..)		
EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE The upper facade of the theatre is largely intact. No structural or design changes are evident above the first floor. Although some maintenance is certainly required, the pressed brick work, windows, and pressed tin cornice are intact as the terra cotta freeze under the center arch. It is possible to see where the letters "OPERA HOUSE" used to be, fixed to the facade. The first floor entry area was modified in 1941 remodeling and is representative of that era.		
INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED) Much of the original interior was remodeled in any of the buildings several renovations. Of note, remaining are the original cast iron support posts for the balcony in the auditorium and a large ornamented plaster ring on the auditorium ceiling which at one time encircled a chandelier and in more recent years, has been punctured by ventilating ducts.		
MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES The Opera House has been renovated several times. In 1920, the removal of the original stage and addition of the second stage and dressing room area (the area to be demolished by the City in early 1985) constituted the greatest change to the structure itself. (cont..)		
PRESENT CONDITION AND USE The Fox Theatre continues to operate as a motion picture theatre. The demolition of the rear stage area should not affect that operation. The building is in need of general maintenance.		
OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE The rear portion of this building is being acquired and will be demolished as part of the Stevens point Downtown Revitalization Program which is being partially funded by an Urban Development Action Grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban development.		
SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDE LISTING ON NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.) NRHP Nomination Form; Pfaller-Herbst & Eppstein & Assoc., Architectural Survey and Historic Preservation Potential Analysis for Central Stevens Point, Wisconsin, October, 1980.		
COMPILER, AFFILIATION Charles W. Gausler, AICP - Sr. Planner (Historian) Howard Needles Tammen & Bergendoff 6815 West Capitol Drive Milwaukee, WI 53216		DATE November 27,

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SIGNIFICANCE - The Andrae Opera House was built in 1893 by Stevens Point merchant, G.F. Andrae who had become very successful in his local dry goods business as well as in downtown real estate.

The Opera House was not the first theatre in the community. H.D. McCulloch built an auditorium/theatre on the second floor of his commercial block erected in 1873 and one or two other facilities, best described as public halls, also existed. However, the Opera House was the first building principally dedicated to live performances and built solely for that purpose.

As was often the case, in smaller communities, the name "opera house" was somewhat pretentious. The theatre booked travelling vaudeville troupes, small plays and musicals, lectures and bands and orchestras rather than actual operas. It was not successful financially and closed in 1915 after 23 years of operation.

The building remained vacant for five years until 1920 when M.E. Bruce and Russell Gregory leased the Opera House and announced that they were going to enlarge and renovate the building turning it into a "modern vaudeville theatre" for the community. This remodeling resulted in the removal of the original stage and construction of the existing stage and dressing room area which is proposed for demolition as part of this project.

Following its reopening in November 1920, motion pictures were shown along with vaudeville and burlesque shows.

In 1923, Bruce and Gregory sold their lease to the Midwest Theatre Corporation which operated it as the Majestic Theatre until 1928. In that year, the Fox Wisconsin Amusement Corporation leased the theatre and, in 1929, once more renovated its interior. It reopened in March, 1929 as the Fox Theatre, the name under which it has operated to the present. Fox Wisconsin Amusement operated the theatre until 1958 after which Prudential and United Artists theatres ran it. In 1978, the present lessee, Rogers Cinema, began using the building.

Stage productions continued in the building, alternating with motion pictures, until 1936. After that point, occasional events were scheduled in the theatre but movies were the primary business. A major internal remodeling in 1941 resulted in the construction of a permanent screen which ended the era of stage productions in the building. The same remodeling project also included the auditorium and the lobby area and resulted in the loss of most of the original major interior features.

The portions of the theatre which will be demolished as a result of the Stevens point Downtown Revitalization Program is only that portion behind the present screen including the stage and dressing rooms abandoned in 1941. The area from the screen back to the front facade of the building and its use as a motion picture theatre will be preserved intact.

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SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE - is also 50 feet wide by 40 feet deep and reaches a height of approximately three stories. Finally, there is a small two-story dressing room area behind the stage which is 30 feet wide and 10 feet deep.

MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES - Remodelings to the interior in 1929 and 1941 removed most of the original features of the auditorium and lobby areas except those noted above.

STATEMENT OF HISTORIC CONTEXT
STEVENS POINT COMMERCIAL HISTORIC DISTRICT

General Character

The proposed Stevens Point Commercial Historic District focuses on Main Street and the Public Square, which constitute the historic commercial center of the community. The District extends from the Square, east along Main Street and includes properties on Strongs Avenue, Water Street, and Second and Third Streets (which run perpendicular to Main Street).

Within the District, buildings are generally one- or two-story masonry structures dating from the mid-19th to early 20th Century. The density of development, combined with repetition of scale, materials and decorative motifs create unified streetscapes. Surrounding the District are more recent structures which are larger in scale and situated on larger lots.

The District includes 23 pivotal buildings, significant either as distinctive examples of local styles or because they represent important aspects of the community's history. Forty-three buildings are evaluated as contributing sites. Despite loss of integrity, these buildings retain scale or details which convey the historic character of the District. A number of these contributing buildings are particularly important in defining the rectangular shape of the Public Square. Non-contributing buildings are those of modern design or those which have been completely remodeled, and no longer harmonize with surrounding buildings. Nine properties are considered non-contributing.

Architectural Background and Significance

The Stevens Point Commercial Historic District encompasses the finest assemblage of 19th and early 20th Century commercial architecture in the City. Stylistically, the buildings range from Italianate to Classical Revival styles, the Romanesque-inspired designs dominating at the turn of the century.

Beginning in the 1840's, free standing frame buildings were erected on Main Street and surrounding the Square. Frame construction was most practical, given Stevens Point's concentration on the lumber industries, and persisted into the early 1880's. However, a number of fine stone commercial buildings were erected in the 1860's and 1870's, and by the 1880's, brick was the major construction material.

The buildings determined as pivotal span the years from 1864 to c. 1930 and provide examples of building styles popular in the community during that period.

A group of stone buildings clustered on Main Street (west of Water Street and Third Street) are important local examples of commercial Italianate design. These pivotal buildings include the Commercial Bank (968 Main Street), the Clifford building (949 Main Street), and a saloon at 944 Main Street. In addition, the McCulloch Block (964 Main Street) remains as a fine, large scale Italianate building which exhibits the characteristic hood molds and cornice of the stone buildings, but which has a brick facade.

A number of smaller, vernacular buildings retain distinctive details and remain as well preserved examples of late 19th Century commercial design. The Alhambra Saloon (1140 Main Street), the Skowronski and King Grocery (835 Main Street), and the C.F. Martin Photography Studio (1325 Water Street) occupy a middleground between the Italianate designs and the more exuberant and agitated Romanesque Revival buildings.

The Chilla building is another significant building dating from the 19th Century. Constructed in 1892, the building displays the massing and details associated with the Second Empire style. Particularly noteworthy is the symmetrical square shape, with projecting central pavilion, inclusion of classical details and the distinctive roof line. Although not a fully developed Second Empire design, the Chilla building remains a final local interpretation of the period.

The best example of a commercial building designed with reference to the Queen Anne style, is the Ossowski and Glinski building, constructed in 1890. Juxtaposition of a variety of surfacing materials, and the use of elements which project from the surface to accent the verticality of the building, characterize the Ossowski-Glinski building and result in the Queen Anne flavor.

Dating from the same period is the First National Bank constructed in 1891. Best characterized as an interpretation of the Richardsonian Romanesque style, the bank is small in scale but conveys a sense of massiveness. The building is faced with sandstone and retains foliated ornament, colonettes (at windows), and elaborate pediment at the roof line. This is the only building in the District constructed on this type of stone and displaying very intricate, delicate ornament.

Arched windows and brick corbelling at cornice level, appear throughout the District. The brickwork is particularly fine in a number of Romanesque Revival buildings constructed around the turn of the century. Generally, the decoration is graduated, culminating in nicely articulated arcature bands at the cornice. The four pivotal buildings demonstrating this are also located on sites which are instrumental in forming the Public Square. The Krembs Hardware building (823 Main Street) and the Johnsen General Store (820-24 Main Street) form a gateway on the west edge of the Square, the Zinda Saloon (844 Main Street) anchors the north edge and the Kuhl Block (913-925 Main Street) is located on the east edge. Although painted, and altered to varying degrees, the buildings are pivotal because of their important role on the Square and as representative examples of commercial architecture in Stevens Point.

The arcade and brick corbelling motifs persisted into the 20th Century, but were increasingly combined with classical motifs. Fine examples of this include the Rothman building (1314 Water Street), Wright building (1003 Main Street), and a more modest commercial building located at 1136 Main Street. The best example of the more academic Classical Revival is the Citizen's National Bank (1045 Main Street). The facade is essentially a monumental portico which contrasts nicely with surrounding buildings, while maintaining the continuity of the streetscape. The facade dates from 1921.

The proposed District also includes one property listed on the National Register of Historic Places, the G.F. Andrae Opera House (1124 Main Street).

Buildings within the District have been altered, particularly on the first story. In some instances, buildings have been painted and elaborate cornices removed. However, the buildings retain sufficient detail, and integrity to convey the 19th Century character of the District. In addition, pivotal buildings, such as the Ossowski-Glinski building, the Zinda Saloon, Johnsen General Store, Krembs Hardware, Skowronski-King Grocery and the Kuhl Block and smaller, contributing buildings define the Public Square, which has been a traditional center of commerce and trade in the development of Stevens Point.

Historical Background

The settlement of Stevens Point commenced in the early 1840's on a promontory of land projecting into the Wisconsin River. This land was at the head of a series of treacherous rapids, while the smoother water to the north was relatively obstacle free. The community was sited in a strategic place to serve the lumber industries to the north, and was known as the "Gateway to the Pineries". Stevens Point became a supply depot and location for transshipment of goods. Supplies were transported by wagon to Stevens Point (to avoid the rapids) and then shipped via the river to the lumber camps. Lumbermen and lumber industries were the major sources of revenue until the late 1880's.

Following the passing of the lumbering era, the City continued as a railroad center until the turn of the century. The Wisconsin Central Railroad (Soo Line) came to Stevens Point in 1871 and, in 1875, opened large car repair shops in the City which became its largest single industry until 1900, when they were removed to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

Throughout the first half of the 20th Century, the City was primarily a farming community and the commercial center of Portage County. After the second World War, the growth of the Hardware Mutuals Insurance Company, now

known as Sentry Insurance, and the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point were largely responsible for the City's emergence as a business, educational and cultural center for Central Wisconsin.

Another important asset to Stevens Point was the surrounding farmlands which provided the community with an expanded area of trade. Beginning in 1857, Polish immigrants began settling in Stevens Point and on the surrounding farms. The Poles became a vital force in the development of the community.

Historical Significance

The Public Square was donated to the community by Matthias Mitchell who registered the first plat of the Village in 1847. This piece of land is located approximately two blocks east of the Wisconsin River and was to be the property of the people, as long as it was used as a public square. In addition to its significance in the plan of the community, the square was significant to the commercial development of Stevens Point and had important ethnic associations.

Commerce

The fact that the local economy was dependent on the lumber trade was reflected in the types of retail establishments surrounding the Public Square. Hotels were located in the vicinity, but the buildings on the Square were devoted to grocery stores, hardware stores and saloons. The Krembs Hardware Co. (823 Main Street) was of particular importance in the development of the area. Founded in 1863, the hardware store served as a major outfitter for the lumber companies headquartered in the area. The existing building replaced an earlier structure on the site in 1895.

The Public Square was the site of weekly markets beginning in the 1860's. The development of the market days were significant in the local economy and as social events. The markets provided a means of selling produce and social interaction between residents of the City and County.

However, the most prominent activities on the Square today are consistent with its earliest days; saloons and parking. Local histories and historians indicate that the Square has always been lined with saloons and, indeed, many of the buildings which remain to the present were built at taverns. These include the Zinda building at 844 Main Street, Nowak Saloon at 1321 Second Street, the Heil Grocery and Saloon at 1313-15 Second Street, the Czaplewski building at 900-904 Main Street, the Ossowski-Glinski building at 916-924 Main Street, the Scharwark building at 1225 Second Street, the Bemowski building at 1220-1228 Second Street, and the building at 1232 Second Street.

As well, from its earliest days, the Square also served as a place to "park" supply wagons and other horse and ox drawn vehicles as well as an open storage area for firewood, building supplies and other cargoes. It should be pointed out that the Public Square in Stevens Point, although always a gathering spot for commercial, social and even political events, was never considered the "better part of town". It was not characterized by some of the more traditional images of a village green; rather it was always an open area principally used for industrial or agricultural commercial services.

In addition to the Square, the remainder of the proposed District was significant to the commercial development of Stevens Point. Retail establishments, professional offices, newspaper offices, and financial institutions were located in buildings on Main Street, Water Street, and Strongs Avenue. This section of the commercial area continued to expand and diversify during the 19th and early 20th Century. In contrast, the buildings surrounding the Square primarily functioned as saloons, with mercantile concerns concentrated in the larger buildings.

Social/Cultural

One of the major cultural centers in Stevens Point was the McCulloch Block (964 Main Street), constructed in 1873. The Opera House, located on the second floor served as the social center of the community until it was displaced by the Andrae Opera House (1124 Main Street), constructed in 1893.

Ethnic

The Public Square and the farmers market are significant as reminders of the role of ethnic groups in the development of Stevens Point. Two specific buildings also symbolize the importance of the Polish community.

The Ossowski-Glinski building is a symbol of the rising influence of the Polish people, who played a significant role in the history and development of the community.

Two newspapers, the Rolnik and Gwiazda Polarna, served the Polish community. The former developed a State-wide circulation, the latter a national market which survived into the 1960's. Both were published by Worzalla and Sons Publishing, located at 1000 Main Street. This building is significant due to its association with the development of the major communication organs of the Polish community.

Association with Significant Persons

Two buildings in the District were associated with the lives of significant people.

The Spraggon building, located at 1331 Second Street, was owned and operated as a bakery by W.W. Spraggon, one of the early political leaders of Stevens Point.

The Tack Block, 1320-22 Strongs Avenue, was owned and financed by Flora Tack, a late 19th Century businesswoman in the City. Tack was one of the most important landholders in the commercial area.